

KATHIE HARDEN

My name is Kathie Harden, I am 33 years old and I live in Flagstaff with my husband Scott and 2 children, ages 7 and 4. I teach 1st and 2nd grade at DeMiguel Elementary School. Five months ago, Tuesday, November 18, I experienced a traumatic event that has changed the way I live my life. I never thought that such an event could happen to a young and healthy person. It was the kind of event you only see on T.V.

The week seemed to be normal. I remember spending the weekend working on report cards at home. I have no memory of working on Monday or Tuesday but several colleagues remind me that I spoke at length with them about the upcoming parent/teacher conferences later in the week. My husband returned home around 8:30 that night. We talked with each other until about 9:00 and then retreated to bed to watch the Food Network. He tells me I fell asleep not long after that, and so did he.



Around 10:00 he awoke because he thought I was snoring...I have been telling him for years

that I do not snore. He turned on the T.V. and gave me a few “gentle” elbows to try to wake me up and soon realized that I was indeed not snoring but rather gasping for air to breathe. While in bed, he tried “not so gentle” sternum rubs but got no response so he knew at that moment that I was not well. After turning the light on, he saw me pale white, not breathing at all. My heart had stopped beating completely. His training and adrenalin immediately kicked in and he began what we were once trained in as CPR. He was not able to get a breath in but I did take a deep breath with compressions,



just enough for him to get to the phone to call 911. Meanwhile, believe it or not, both kids slept through the entire event.

Upon arrival at Flagstaff Medical Center, several types of tests were completed in hopes of ruling out various conditions. The only successful test was the CAT scan which ruled out brain trauma-the original assumption. At the point, I was transferred to the 24 hour hypothermia bed/ICU in hopes of saving my brain from any additional damage. Monday afternoon I was taken for a 3 hour long MRI, the electrophysiology procedure, and the insertion of a defibrillator/pacemaker. The diagnosis was a virus-much like the influenza virus which attacked and deteriorated the left side of my heart. The right side compensated as long as it could.

When all was said and done, they sent me home Wednesday night-just in time for the Thanksgiving holiday where I was surrounded by great food and my family-shedding a new light on the meaning of the holiday. My mom moved in to help (Scott was thrilled) because by AZ state law I was not able to drive for 3 months. Since then, I have completed 3 months of physical therapy, I have slowly but surely returned to work 3 days a week and I am able to run 4 times a week for 30 minutes.

Enjoy life and everything that each day brings, and learn to appreciate what you have. The amazing amount of support that we have received has been incredible! I would not be standing here today, sharing my story with you, without all of the individuals mentioned above. Those people will always have a very special place in my heart!

—Kathie Harden, April 2009